

## Stanislavskij's Method Improves Personality Aspects in Pre-adolescents

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### Abstract:

In Stanislavskij's method, emotions are produced through body actions, where the body is the custodian of the actions associated with emotions. This association could improve some aspects of personality. Everyone can feel themselves in an immediate way. Hence, an increased knowledge of emotions and thoughts can improve the relationship with others. In the current study, 74 boys and girls took part in a research to ascertain if participation to a workshop on Stanislavskij's method can improve some personality aspects, according to the Big Five theory. The workshop was divided into two stages: (1) subjects were invited to tell a story with their body, sounds, and in narration; (2) discovering the places of Carloforte island. The final event was a personal rendering of the experience.

The six-month experiment included three weekly meetings of three hours each. On the first day, the BFC was administered to each subject and re-administered on the last day of the experiment. Results showed that Energy, Friendship and Openness factors improve after the workshop. This can be explained by the Stanislavskij's method enabling subjects to feel emotions and handle conflicts immediately through the body and the use of actions.

**Keywords:** Stanislavskij's method, Pre-adolescent, Theater workshop, Personality, Big Five Children.

### Introduction

The link between Psychology and Theater is very strong. These two disciplines, even presenting different methods and goals, are actually much closer than the researchers admit. The major link is observed between Stanislavskij's thought and Psychology, although performance on stage is the goal for the former and individual well-being is the goal for the latter.

Stanislavskij (1936; 1938; 1950) claims that the actor must be freed from his personal schemes and, to be credible, he/she must "melt" with the character he plays. Only about one hundred years later, Berne (1967) will talk about personal scripts. Stanislavskij asks to interpret the character "psychologically", referring to a set of psychological situations that coincide with the actor's experience. To do this, Stanislavskij draws on different artistic experiences and creates a system of physical exercises to transform the body into a tool ready to accept the psychological

nuances of the character. According to the author, the body is the custodian of the actions corresponding both to emotions and states of mind for the theater workshop.

Stanislavskij's method is a system in which emotions are produced through the use of actions, analytical research of the given circumstances of the text, and imagination (Bussels, 2012). Hence, these characteristic aspects of Stanislavskij's method show a psychological value because the body is a mean to join emotions. Through the action, the emotions linked to it reappear in all its cognitive and neuro-autonomic conditions. Thus, one can learn to get familiar with emotions, to get to know them and use them in an adaptive way. Stanislavskij stresses the objectives, which are the character's goals within each scene (Bussel, 2012).

Also, this aspect shows a psychological background. Moving with a pre-fixed goal is crucial to recognize the self and for a more internal locus of control.

From another point of view, the creative aspect has been observed to create wellbeing both as an immediate "activator" of positive emotion and as a process of problem-solving that can be generalized to more than one reality (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Moreover, positive mood is associated with creativity and innovative action (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). As for the emotional aspects, Fauladi and Shabidi (2010) remarked that creativity plays a primary role in reducing anxiety and depression.

Another critical point is the group as a system for experimenting and creating one's own identity. In this context, a theater workshop is a typical group activity. In a workshop, the creative process operates simultaneously for every individual involved, as well as for the group. The process understanding is organically synergic (Bicherstaff, 2011).

For these reasons, it was decided to experiment a Stanislavskij theater workshop in preadolescents. As a matter of fact, the union with peers in preadolescents plays a vital role in the construction of self. In this context, the current study aims to ascertain if participating in a theater workshop can change some aspects of personality according to the Big Five Children (BFC) model. Specifically, it was studied if the actor's work, carried out in school, can stimulate to experiment new skills and problem-solving involving personality aspects according to the BFC model. A better knowledge of emotions in preadolescents, experienced through physical actions, should improve self-efficacy, positively affecting personality.

## **Methods**

This study was carried out on 74 subjects (40 males and 34 females) divided into an Experimental group, with 38 subjects, and a Control group with 36. All the students attended the second year of the secondary school course of the Don Gabriele Pagani Institute of Carloforte (12.4 years old  $\pm$  6.0 months). Boys and girls were randomly assigned to Experimental or Control groups. The Experimental group was involved in a workshop on a Stanislavskij's method held by professional actors. The Control group was involved in a volleyball training activity aiming to participate at a junior national competition.

### **Procedure**

The workshop was divided into two phases. In the first, the subjects were invited to work on the body (*i.e.* tell a story with the body); on the voice (*i.e.* tell a story with the sounds, both vocal and coming from musical instruments) and on the narration. The second phase was based on the discovery of the places on Carloforte island. The final event was a personal rendering of the experience. Both groups were involved for six months in the experiment with three weekly meetings of three hours each. All the subjects carried out their own activities in the school gym. On the first day, the Big Five Children (BFC) was administered to everyone. The same test was re-administered on the last day of the experience.

### **Theatre Workshop of Stanislavsky's Method**

The workshop was divided into two stages: (i) pre-expressive and (ii) improvisation into the habitat.

(i) Pre-expressive stage. This stage focused on: actions and reactions; play; sound, dance, and rhythm. All activities focused on the body in order to re-establish a perfect contact with the body itself. At this stage, some theatrical techniques were used: "the body as a story-teller", "the sound as a story-teller" and "the voice as a story-teller".

1) The body as a "story-teller". These techniques were based upon the different parts of the body. First, the backbone as the movement generator was considered. Then, differentiation of the superior part of the body from the inferior one was stressed. Again, the homo-lateral movement was refined by moving either the right part of the body or the left one, separately. Last, focus on the lightness or heaviness of the body and on the impulse coming from head, shoulder, hands and posterior was put. All these exercises aimed to expressive as well as creative improvisations.

2) The sound as a "story-teller". These techniques focused on telling a story by means of sounds, where voice and words were linked profoundly to the body and implied speaking as a physical action. Boys and girls were invited to focus on breath and how vocal emission, linked to movement, becomes more fluent. Moreover, the sound changes according to the body parts associated to it.

3) The voice as a "story-teller". Boys and girls were divided into three groups. Each group was given a story. Subjects had to tell a story by using the expressive means developed in the previous steps (*i.e.* body and sound as story-tellers).

### **Improvisation into the habitat**

This stage consisted of a three-day itinerary across the island of Carloforte. Through improvisation techniques, as well as songs and stories, the subjects "met" three local mythological characters of the island called *Vegiumen*, *Raza du Paise*, and *Puvuppo*, respectively. They told to

these characters the story developed in the previous stages. As a final point, a rendering containing all the elements elaborated in the six-month theatre experience was organized.

### **Big Five Children (BFC) Test**

The following definitions of the principal dimension and their facets were used as generative criteria for statements in BFQ.

Energy/Extraversion (E): refers to the characteristic that in the literature are subsumed by Extraversion (McCrae and Costa, 1987) or by Surgency (Goldberg, 1990). The label “Energy” seemed more appropriate to the specific meaning that in the Italian context is associated with the words “Extraversion”, often used as a synonym of Sociability, and “Surgency”. This dimension is organized into the following two facets: “Dynamism”, referring to expansiveness and enthusiasm, and “Dominance”, referring to assertiveness and confidence.

Friendliness (F): refers to the factor usually labeled Agreeableness (McCrae and Costa, 1987) or Friendliness vs Hostility (Digman, 1990). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: “Cooperativeness/Empathy”, referring to concern and sensitiveness towards others and their needs, and “Politeness”, referring to kindness, civility, docility, and trust.

Conscientiousness (C): refers to impulse control in both its proactive and inhibitory aspects (Digman, 1990; McCrae and Costa, 1989). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: “Scupulousness”, referring to dependability, orderliness and precision, and “Perseverance”, referring to the capability of fulfilling one’s own tasks and commitments.

Emotional Stability (S): refers to aspects of “negative affectivity” (Watson and Tellegen, 1985; McCrae and Costa, 1987). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: “Emotion Control”, referring to the capacity to cope adequately with one’s own anxiety and emotionality, and “Impulse Control”, referring to the capability of controlling irritation, discontent, and anger. For the children version “Emotional Instability” is used.

Openness (O): refers to the factor labeled Culture (Norman, 1963), or Intellect (Goldberg, 1990), or Openness to Experience (Costa and McCrae, 1985). This dimension is organized into the following two facets: “Openness to Culture”, referring to the broadness or narrowness of one’s own cultural interest, and “Openness to Experience”, referring to openness to novelty, tolerance of different values, interest toward different people, habits and lifestyle.

### **Data analysis**

The data consist of the answers of each subject to the BFC, divided by factor (Energy, Friendship, Conscientiousness, Emotional Instability, and Openness) in the two surveys: Test and Retest.

In order to verify the differences between the Test period and the Retest period and, therefore, to verify changes in the personality aspects of the subjects, a mixed ANOVA 2 x 2 x 5 was performed.

Factors were: Gender (2 levels: male and female), Groups (2 levels: Experimental. Control), Time (2 levels: Test and retest), BFC (5 levels: Energy, Friendship, Conscientiousness, Emotional Instability and Openness).

#### Results

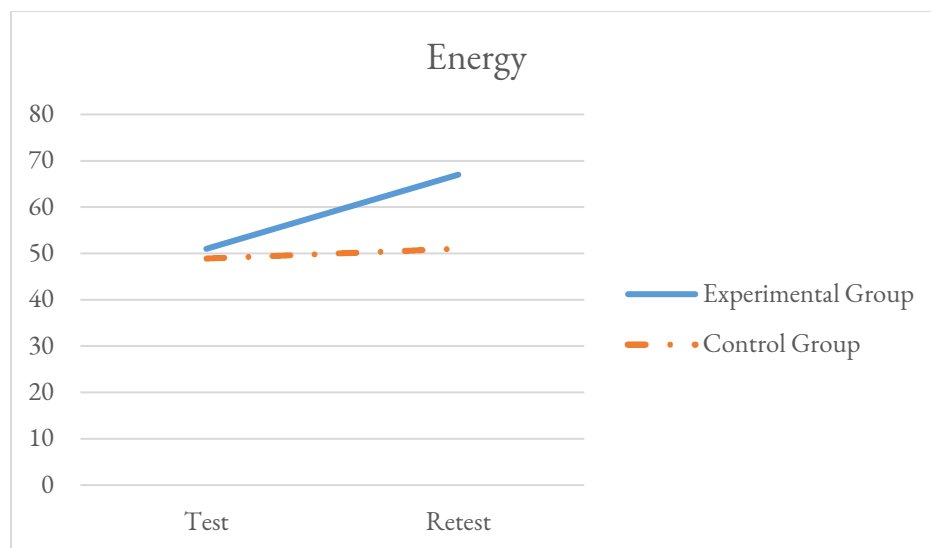
ANOVA 2x2x2x5 (mixed design) showed significant results for interaction between Groups x Time and BFC ( $P < 0.01$ ); Gender was not significant (male:  $49 \pm 11$ ; female  $53 \pm 12$ ).

Duncan test showed:

1. Significant differences for Energy for Experimental group between Test and retest ( $p < 0.05$ ).
2. Significant differences for Friendship for both groups between Test and retest ( $p < 0.05$ ).
3. Significant differences for Friendship in retest phase among groups ( $p < 0.01$ ).
4. Significant differences for Openness for both groups between Test and retest ( $p < 0.05$ ).
5. Significant differences for Openness in retest phase among groups ( $p < 0.01$ ).

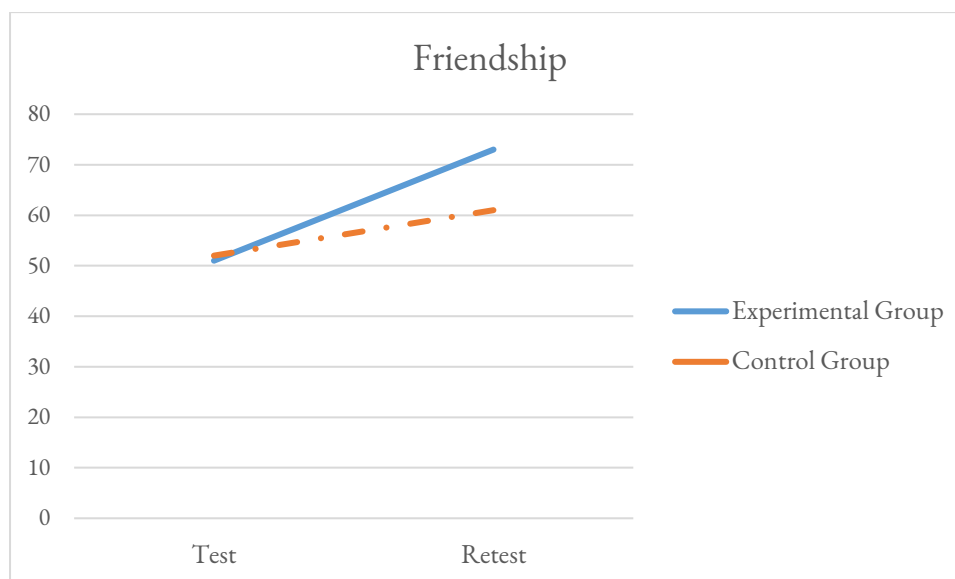
All other comparisons were not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Graph. 1 shows a significant increase from Test to Retest for Energy in the Experimental group. The Control group did not show significant differences between Test and Retest (Graph. 1).



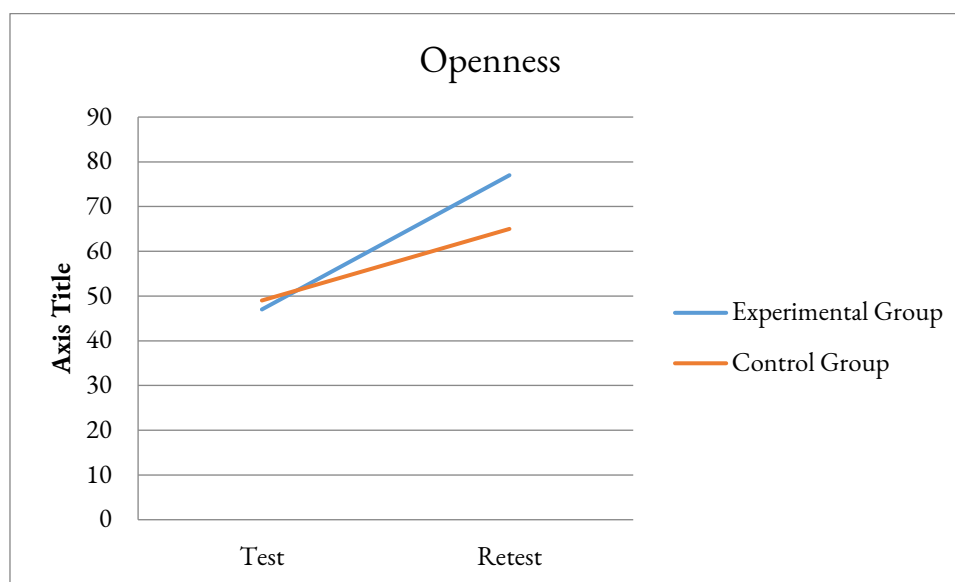
Graph. 1 – Differences from Test to Retest for Energy in the Experimental and in the Control groups.

Graph. 2 shows significant differences between Test and Retest for Experimental and Control groups for Friendship. At the Test, no significant differences between Experimental and Control groups were found. At the Retest, a significant increase in Friendship for both groups was found, but a significantly higher increase for the Experimental Group was observed (Graph. 2).



Graph 2 – Differences from Test to Retest for Friendship in the Experimental and in the Control groups.

Graph. 3 shows significant differences between Test and Retest for Experimental and Control groups for Openness. At the Test, no significant difference between Experimental and Control groups was found. At the Retest, a significant increase in Openness for both groups was found, but a significantly higher increase for the Experimental Group was observed (Graph. 3).



Graph 3 – Differences from Test to Retest for Openness in the Experimental and in the Control groups.

## Discussion

The current study shows a significant increase between the beginning and the end of the workshop for Energy, Friendship and Openness. This means that the workshop can be a helpful tool to test oneself and live emotions freely. Furthermore, the group may be a protection both for

the single and the group. Also, the Control group shows a significant increase for Friendship and Openness, because it is a social and group activity whatsoever, but a greater increase for the group participating in the Stanislavskij's method (1936; 1938; 1950) workshop was observed. The link between actions and emotions is helpful to recognize oneself's emotions as well as the other's ones. This implies, in one hand, a greater openness and acceptance of the other and, on the other hand, a greater openness towards the experiences of life.

Finally, for Energy, a significant increase in the Experimental group, while in the Control group no significant change was detected. This is likely due to the need to get involved in the first person, a typical situation of Stanislavskij's method. Furthermore, the greatest increase in Energy can be explained by Stanislavskij's method pushing subjects to test themselves, try emotions and handle psychological conflicts immediately through body, as well as physical actions. Finally, also learning to move with a goal implies the responsibility of one own actions and puts the individual as the only actor of his/her own life.

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